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## FROM GRAMMAR TO HIGH SCHOOL: A FEW SUGGESTIONS.

WHY is it that so few pupils, graduates of the public grammar school, enter and complete the high-school course? It is well understood that there is bound to be a gradual falling out all along the grades from the first grade to the eighth. Children die, move away from the district, leave school to go to work, are kept out by parents to assist in the house or shop, and become truants and vagabonds where the laws are loosely administered. A study of any well-kept school record would prove this beyond cavil, year after year—but why is it that so many fall out in passing from the eighth to the ninth grade, or from grammar school to high school? My experience, covering twenty years in a grammar school, has been that generally a boy or girl who has safely landed in the seventh grade, will make strenuous efforts to finish (and graduate in) the eighth grade, but will not make equal efforts to enter the ninth grade. There must be some good and salient reasons for this curious phenomenon.

The chief reason, in my opinion, is the abrupt break in continuity of work: new and strange buildings, strange teachers, strange system of teaching, strange books. The child has primitive man's instincts: every stranger is necessarily an enemy, and he dreads strange things. The high school is a strange thing.

Aside from being presumably a very expensive place where one must dress better, buy one's own lunch and purchase more expensive books, the child regards it as a very learned place "where one has to spend four long years studying dead languages, and mathematics, where one cuts up and studies such uninteresting things as frogs, bugs and weeds, where one has to study rhetoric and write essays and learn poetry and such stuff," etc.

In addition to all this is the stirring of commercial activity in the boy's breast. The vibrations of the world's material activities awake kindred vibrations in his mind, and he wants *to*

*do something*. When he was an infant his constant cry was: "Mamma, I want *to do something*." When he reaches the adolescent period (synchronous with finishing the eighth grade) his cry is: "Father, I want *to do something*." His ideas of *doing* are not study and reflection, but active commercial or industrial life of some sort.

Again, in the grammar school, the eighth grade pupil is, in his own estimation and that of his mates, a very important personage, looked up to and trusted, one whose sense of responsibility and honor of position is very keen. The sense of traditional and ceremonial values is very strong in children: the eighth grade boy is lord of all he surveys on the playground and his word is law. He is often consulted by the master and a united remonstrance from eighth grade boys is generally successful with the *patria potestas* of the school. In fact, his what might be called social position as regards other pupils in lower grades is pretty much that of a medieval baron.

Now, on entering the high school, he becomes socially, in his opinion, a nobody in a system that is strange to him — and being strange, is, at first at least, distasteful. He may never enter the high school, but he learns these things by that queer but effective method of transmission of mental impressions so notable among the young.

Accustomed for eight years to the personal care and attention of one teacher who knows his peculiarities, who takes a personal and probably affectionate interest in him as a human being, he finds himself suddenly precipitated into a system where he is simply an entity, a draft horse, a machine, a negligible quantity. The boy or girl of 14 or 15, the average age of leaving the grammar school, is still a child in a pedagogic sense; the kindly, sympathetic interest of the teacher counts for everything with him. During the five-hour sessions for ten months in a year, the grammar-school teacher studies and learns thoroughly the child's mental and emotional make-up. He is encouraged, checked, helped or made to study out problems as best suits his disposition — is in fact treated like a son or daughter so far as educational limits permit. This continuous, direct,

mental contact with the personality of *one* teacher, whose mind is mature, well disciplined, balanced and dominating at a time when the child's mind is wax to receive and marble to retain impressions is exactly what he needs and gets in the grammar school—and does not get in the high school. Therein high school teaching is weak.

What can be done to bridge over the abyss between the eighth and ninth grades—between grammar and high school? Probably there will always in every condition of society be plenty of hewers of wood and drawers of water, yet few people will deny that a larger percentage of high-school trained minds in the general walks of life would be a distinct gain to our civilization—especially about election time.

The first and undoubtedly the most important step would be to bring about a *rapprochement* between high and grammar-school teachers. One sees frequent conferences between different grade teachers of the grammar schools and between similar teachers in high schools, but very rarely between teachers of high and grammar schools. Indeed there seems to be a certain aloofness on the part of high-school teachers which is often amusing and always detrimental to school interests. The situation reminds one of "A Certain Condescension in Foreigners," so well discussed by Lowell. Why a person whose teaching is limited to certain elementary facts connected with lines and angles, or who is busy hammering the six declensions and four conjugations of Latin into youthful heads day after day, year after year, or whose mental scope in school is confined to a study of certain not universally attractive forms of animal life—why such persons should assume superior airs in the presence of other persons who teach American and English history and half a dozen other equally important and complex subjects, is not altogether glaringly patent. So long as this inexcusably silly caste feeling exists, the hiatus between eighth and ninth grade will continue to exist; and the cause of higher education will languish.

Nor is the necessity of a complete change of text-books apparent. Algebra for instance is begun in the grammar school

and continued in the high school. The same text-book would do for both grades and help keep up the continuity of study. Even if a text-book were confessedly constructed so as to be finished in the eighth and ninth grades this would be a great gain. One might even go so far as to suggest that eighth grade pupils should go over to the high-school building to recite perhaps once a week in some subject or have joint exercises of some sort for the express purpose of familiarizing them with the high-school system and minimizing their natural feeling of strangeness. Possibly some arrangement for interchange of work for brief periods between eighth and ninth grade teachers, the pupils remaining in their own buildings the meanwhile; visits more or less frequent between eighth and ninth grade teachers; consultations between principals of grammar and high schools; and finally conferences between grammar and high-school teachers based on observed work and methods—these would probably result in placing the eighth and ninth grade work on the more rational basis of mutual helpfulness.

Further emphasis on the essential unity of study in these two systems could be secured by placing grammar and high schools in any given district under one district superintendent, who should overlook all educational interests within his district from kindergarten to preparation for the university. His personal influence could be a great factor in unifying these discordant systems.

The present style of specializing in high-school work is not in all respects commendable. The theory that each teacher like a university professor becomes an expert is questionable. The profession of teaching is each year attracting more and more graduates from first-class universities, men and women of thorough and broad scholarship. Many of these young men and women have turned an honest dollar in fitting successfully students for the freshman year of high-class universities. Or, stated in other terms, they are capable of teaching every subject in the curriculum of the best high schools, except perhaps the pronunciation of modern languages. It is perfectly feasible then, it must be admitted, to secure high-school teachers who

could handle successfully a group of fifty pupils under an arrangement whereby one teacher might take what is called for convenience literary studies, and another the scientific studies. That is to say, the high-school curriculum might be thus divided and two teachers could easily between them take a group through the ninth or tenth grade.

If in the meanwhile in the eighth grade of the grammar school, the so called Departmental Method were used with discretion (whereby two or possibly three teachers teach each a subject like Music or Science or Drawing in the other's room), and if in the high-school some modification were made, in the first year at least, of the elaborate specialty-teacher system, undoubtedly the shock to pupils resulting from sudden change of method and strange surroundings could be lessened or practically abolished. The gain in mental activity and freshness on the part of the high-school teachers thus relieved from the drudgery of teaching the elements of one subject over and over again *ad nauseam*, would do much to retain pupils who now find high-school teaching unsympathetic and mechanical.

The recent extraordinary development of American commerce and industries demands recognition even in the high-school curriculum. As a people we seem to have quit playing in the rôle of a hermit nation. Those who rule the world must know the world. Our young men must study foreign nations' history, language, commerce and industries. To know Spanish, for example, is no longer a dilettante accomplishment but a prime necessity in many branches of commerce and manufactures. Commercial geography and the undisputed elementary facts of political economy are quick assets in the equipment of young men for business life. Typewriting and shorthand have often been the stepping stones to greater things while serving as a pot-boiler till opportunity occurs. Telegraphy, bookkeeping, and elementary business law, if taught in a high school, would attract many a promising youth who, feeling the spur of present impecuniosity, resorts to the expensive, superficial, and narrow, so-called business college on leaving the grammar school. Many children fail to go to high school, not because

they are unwilling to study, but because the studies they think, or their parents think, are useful and suitable, are not offered. If the high school were to offer courses which would attract the active, ambitious, striving youth of the land, whose tastes are not in the least bookish, who from choice or necessity will depend on their own exertions for a living in the near future, and who with their bread-and-butter studies might take one or more culture-and-discipline studies, the "people's university" would come nearer fulfilling its proper function in the community. With harmonious, unified management, candidly recognizing facts as they exist today and striving to adapt public education to present needs and opportunities, there is no good and sufficient reason why the ninth and subsequent grades should not bear about the same numerical ratio to grammar school grades that the latter do to primary grades.

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